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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 010164

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SUBJECT: CARAMAGNA POSITIVE ON OAS VERIFICATION MISSION'S
FUTURE ROLE

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood.

Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

11. (C) WHA/AND Director Phil French met with Organization of American States (OAS) Verification Mission Director Sergio Caramagna on October 21 to discuss financial and political support for the mission. Caramagna explained that a lack of resources had limited the mission's capacity to assist the peace process. Nevertheless, the region is finally beginning to back Colombia with increased political and personnel support; he hoped that financial contributions would follow. Despite the recent setbacks in negotiations between the GOC and AUC leaders he believes, the fact that the leaders are still sitting at the negotiating table is positive. End Summary.

PROGRESS IN COLOMBIA APPARENT

12. (SBU) WHA/AND Director French and OAS Verification Mission Director Caramagna during their meeting on October 21 agreed that Colombia has made significant progress on various fronts over the last decade. Caramagna's impression was that Colombia's institutional capacity is one of the strongest in the region. The GOC's determination to fight against illegality is the result of its major security advancements. According to Caramagna, its ability, thus far, to demobilize over 11,000 illegal combatants is notable and contributing to the decrease in crime in the country. The GOC's commitment to the AUC peace process at the highest levels of government is strong and impressive.

BACKGROUND ON THE OAS VERIFICATION MISSION

13. (SBU) Caramagna explained that the OAS received a mandate to provide assistance to a peace process of a magnitude unprecedented in the region. To accomplish that mandate, the OAS was given three principal tasks: 1) to verify the cessation of hostilities; 2) to verify disarmament; and 3) to work with communities affected by the violence. Nevertheless, because of lack of resources, the OAS is struggling to fulfill all its commitments. The total staff of the mission is 42, with only 20 in the field. With only four staff members in the area of Santa Fe de Ralito, for example, the mission is assisting 60 communities. Active in eight conflict areas now, Caramagna said the mission will have to at least double its personnel to provide effective coverage throughout the country.

EFFORTS TO INCREASE SUPPORT FOR THE MISSION

14. (SBU) Caramagna was eager to report that the region is finally showing its support to Colombia. He said the region is beginning to realize that the conflict belongs to the entire continent. Several countries are experiencing similar problems of governability associated with the legitimacy of the State. Caramagna said it is critical for the OAS to obtain internal consensus among its members that Colombia should be a priority and that Latin America should not wait for external assistance from the Europeans and others to begin bringing peace to the region.

15. (C) Caramagna noted that the mission has received in recent weeks support from Mexico, Brazil, Chile, and the Bahamas. Bahamas, support during the permanent council meeting on Colombia's peace process in October was symbolic but important. In particular, Mexico was willing to send "experts". Other countries that have offered support outside the region, besides the United States and Canada, include Spain, Netherlands, Ireland, and Korea. WHA/AND Director French explained that Colombia faces the "chicken and the egg" dilemma, which is that countries are unwilling to support the mission until they see progress, but the mission's progress is harder to achieve without increased

support.

READ-OUT ON STATE OF GOC/AUC NEGOTIATIONS

16. (C) As the GOC attempted to negotiate the demobilization with the most difficult paramilitary blocs, the transfer of Diego Murillo, AKA "Don Berna" to a high-security prison was damaging paramilitary confidence in the process, Caramagna said. Despite the recent setbacks in negotiations between the GOC and AUC leaders, the fact that the leaders are still sitting at the negotiating table should be interpreted as a sign that talks would continue to move forward. He warned, however, that the paramilitaries, fear over extradition and jail time will continue to be obstacles.

17. (U) This cable has been cleared by WHA/AND office director French.

WOOD